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Directorate of Intelligence

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European Review

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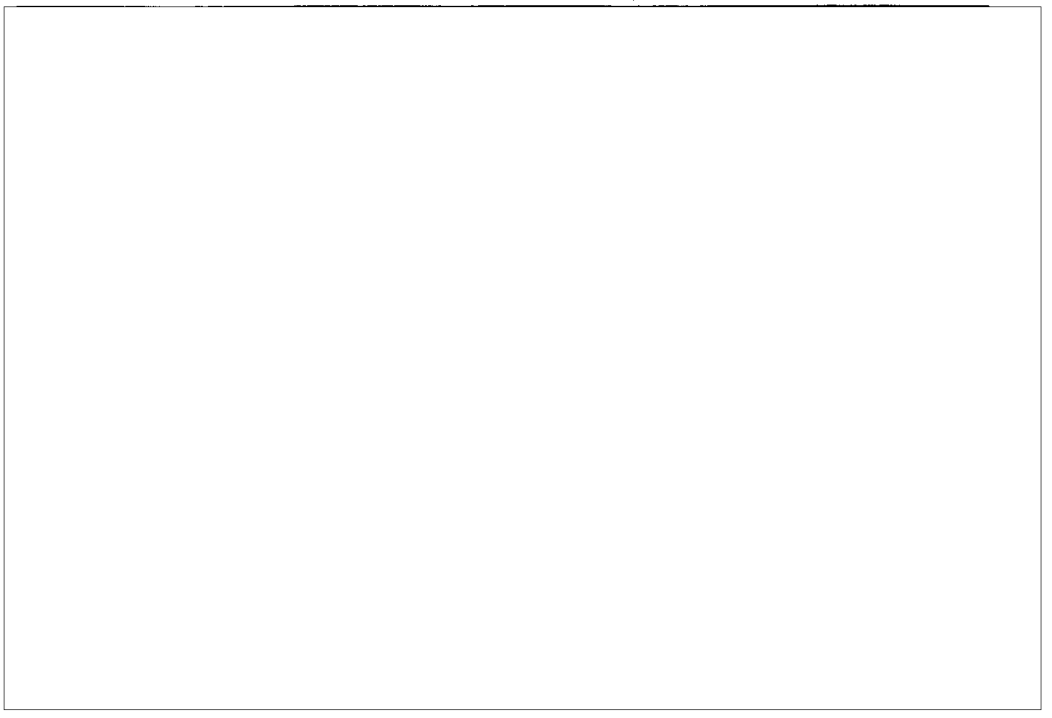

Western Europe–Argentina

Impact of the Missing Persons Issue 3.5(c)

The recent discovery of mass graves near Buenos Aires has increased West European concern with Argentine human rights practices. France, West Germany, and Italy have inquired into the fate of present and former citizens who disappeared in Argentina between 1974 and 1979. An Italian parliamentary group plans to go to Buenos Aires early next year to investigate the disappearance of its nationals. The discovery of the graves may have influenced some West European votes on the recent Argentine-sponsored UN resolution calling for negotiations about the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands. Many observers initially expected France, West Germany, and Italy to support the resolution, but they all finally abstained.

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France, West Germany, and Italy still appear anxious to normalize economic relations with Argentina, but their efforts will depend in part on public attitudes toward the missing persons issue. The question is least likely to have an impact in France. Public reaction there has been relatively mild and the French Government resumed arms shipments to Argentina even after the discovery of the mass graves. In West Germany, public protest may hinder further efforts to improve relations with Argentina. A Foreign Ministry spokesman has said publicly that the government will continue to press Argentina for information about the "disappeared" regardless of any effect on bilateral relations. 3.5(c)

The issue is likely to have the most serious consequences in Italy. The large number of missing persons of Italian origin has inspired wide media coverage and strong popular protest. Although a Foreign Ministry report indicates that the ministry has tried to handle the issue with great care in order not to prejudice Italian-Argentine relations, public and parliamentary opinion may force the government to link improvement of trade relations to Argentine progress toward democracy. 3.5(c)

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